Pest Alert

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

Northeastern Area
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Garlic Mustard — *Alliaria petiolata* [Bieb] Cavara & Grande

Garlic mustard was used as an edible green in Europe and may have been brought to North America by European settlers. The coarsely toothed leaves give off a garlic-like odor when crushed, accounting for its common name and use in cooking. It is a member of the mustard family.

Native range: Europe and Asia

For more information visit: http://www.nps.gov/htdocs2/plants/alien/map/alpe1.htm

Garlic mustard reproduces exclusively by seed. It is an obligate biennial. The first year the seeds germinate and develop a basal rosette of kidney-shaped leaves, and the following year it produces an upright stalk with triangular leaves. The stalk bears terminal clusters of small white flowers. After flowering and producing large quantities of seeds in elongate seed capsules, the plant dies.

Second year garlic mustard plant with terminal white flowers, elongate seed capsules, and coarsely toothed triangular leaves.

The plant has no natural enemies and can be present in an area for years before it appears—often seeming to explode. Garlic mustard can invade forested areas, even areas that have not been disturbed. It grows quickly in the late fall and early spring, when most native species are dormant. In addition, the rosette stage stays green through the first winter.

In this country, the threat from garlic mustard comes from its lack of natural enemies. Even the white-tailed deer seem to prefer native plants to garlic mustard. Because it persists through the first winter as a green rosette, it can overrun and eliminate many native plants. Consequently, it would deprive us of the vibrant display of native spring wild flowers.

For more information on garlic mustard, please visit the following Web sites:

NPCI Alien Plant Working Group

https://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/factmain.htm

Cornell University, Biological Control of Weeds—Garlic Mustard

http://warren.cce.cornell.edu/natural-resources/invasive-plants/garlic-mustard

Tennessee Exotic Pest Plant Council

https://www.invasive.org/species/list.cfm?id=72

Virginia Natural Heritage Program Fact Sheet—Garlic Mustard

http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/document/fsalpe.pdf

Dense patch of garlic mustard

Photographs by Rosemarie Boyle.

For additional information, contact:

USDA Forest Service
Wayne National Forest
Rosemarie Boyle
219 Columbus Road
Athens, OH 45701
(740) 592-0200

USDA Forest Service
Forest Health Protection
180 Canfield Street
Morgantown, WV 26505
(304) 285-1541